

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

versus

JAMES VELISSARIS,

Defendant.

No. 1:22-cr-00105-DLC

Hon. Denise L. Cote

**SENTENCING MEMORANDUM
ON BEHALF OF DEFENDANT
JAMES VELISSARIS**

EXHIBIT A

[REDACTED]

Exhibit A-1

Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Court Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

James has been a loving husband to me for the last 13 years. We met when he was 23 years old and a recent Harvard graduate. He was always quiet, introverted, humble and safe.

Being raised by his mother, aunts and sisters, James had an incredible respect for women. He was always overly generous to me because he wanted to be the good Christian husband his mother never had. Growing up in his tumultuous household, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and this greatly colored his perspective on the world. In addition, being part of a biracial family, there was rampant racism and abuse from his own extended family members. As you can imagine, not feeling safe, accepted or loved in your own home has a deleterious effect on a young mind.

Because of his family's lack of financial resources, James was constantly moving. It wasn't uncommon for him to come home and see all of his belongings strewn across the yard with an eviction notice on the door. While living in the projects of Chicago with his aunt's family, he couldn't play outside for fear of being recruited or shot by gang violence. It was here that he vowed to learn how to make money so he could protect and care for his family.

Instead of joining the neighborhood gang, James joined the math club. In lieu of drugs to balm his pain, James chose football. These early choices got him through the most challenging times in his childhood and, against all odds, got him through the gates of Harvard.

Yes, James went to Harvard, but he wasn't your typical Harvard man. While his privileged classmates were eating in the cafeteria, he was cleaning their toilets. While they were on spring break, he was working in campus security to help stop campus rape. While they were at their summer homes, James was in the south side of Chicago setting up charity football camps to keep youth off the street. While the elite were planning to buy summer homes in the Hamptons, James was planning to get his mother from out of the trailer park

into decent housing. While they spend their money on exclusive, expensive Manhattan prep schools, James funds scholarships for local black students in underserved Atlanta City Public Schools and gives generously to the very scholarship programs that helped him to excel.

By the time I met James, he had developed a hard exterior but still had a soft heart. I appreciated his intellect, charm and ambition, but all of that paled in comparison to how much he cared for his family. I came from a solid family upbringing, where my family took care of me. So, it was hard for me to understand why, as the youngest child these responsibilities would fall to James. He often paid bills for his older brother and helped pay for him to attend Northwestern University, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He took care of his mother and stepfather when they lost everything during the housing crisis and he set up a college fund for his niece, the list of James's charity can go endlessly on...And these were things he did before he had "made it". He would sacrifice for his family, while eating from the dollar menu at McDonalds and sleeping in the equivalent of a closet, and not think twice about it.

The challenges that James overcame during his youth made him a kind, generous, empathetic and loving soul and he was now able to protect and care for his family like he had always planned.

James is the backbone of support for his family. He is not greedy and would never intentionally hurt someone for his own financial gain. As most of the money he did make, he gave away to family, church, scholarships, breast cancer support, his alma mater, medical debt forgiveness and human trafficking organizations. In his life, he's only owned and held one physical asset, the house he bought for his mother.

James is selfless. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] During that time, when my father and I attended a family wedding out of state, James volunteered to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
James supports me and my family in so many ways. Providing financial planning advice, emotional encouragement, using his connections to elevate their careers and mentoring on how to navigate the world as a man of color.

[REDACTED] But that's the kind of selfless, Christian James is, and that is why we, and especially I, need him to stay in our lives so much. During the pandemic, [REDACTED], so we promptly moved. He bought a property with everything I needed just in case it would be years before either of us could have contact with the outside world again.

James has been such a light to everyone in our lives. However, this situation has been very dark. I've seen just how extremely remorseful James is about how this series of unfortunate events unfolded. I hope he will one day be able to forgive himself.

He was so proud of his "hedge fund for the masses" because he wanted to level the playing field and create a pathway to economic equality. The creation of this fund was intended for good, not as a premeditated scheme to defraud the very community that he wanted to empower. As anyone, who actually knows James will tell you, that's just not his nature.

Your honor, because of this very public shaming and persecution, James and all of our families have already endured immeasurable pain, trauma and lost so much throughout the last 3 years. Please don't let us also lose James who we all need and love so dearly.

Sincerely,
Maria

[REDACTED]
Atlanta, Ga

Exhibit A-2

Rita Velissaris

[REDACTED]
Las Vegas, NV

January 14, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

My son, James Velissaris, has been a joy to raise. He is the youngest of my five children. As a young child James was helpful with household chores and generous. Our family was not well off when he was born. During James' early childhood there were times when we had to reside in hotels or with extended family members, while we searched for housing. This was before laws existed that prevented a landlord from declining a rental application that included children. James' biological father (my ex-husband) had a difficult time keeping steady employment, although he had graduate level college education. We were unable to provide stable housing for our family at that time. Life at that time was difficult, [REDACTED]. After I discovered this, I had to take the children and escape.

For many years during my separation and divorce I worked two jobs to support the family. My income was never enough. We never applied for or received any welfare nor food stamps, although at times we may have qualified due to lower income and a large family. We stretched our food budget by being vegetarians several days of the month, long before it was en vogue. I wanted each of my children to learn the value of hard work.

James and his brother Christopher earned their first partial scholarships at Roycemore School, a prep school for grades K-12. Their hard work and determination allowed them to receive an excellent elementary school education for a few years and to play basketball for Roycemore. Most of James' elementary school years were spent at public schools. James worked part time during his high school and college education. James was extremely athletic and a good student. He played football starting at age ten (10) with the Park District in the Pop Warner Program in Chicago, IL. He continued to play through all four years of high school and all four years at Harvard University. His ability in football and his academic test scores earned him a scholarship first at the **U.S. Naval Academy**. He received a recommendation for the Naval Academy from the Honorable Rahm Emanuel and others. Ultimately, he decided to accept the **Harvard University Football Program** offer instead. His scholarship offers were earned due to his good character, community service, strong work ethic, strong academic ability, and exceptional talent as a football player.

James has always been a caring and loving son to me. He is responsible and has very high integrity. James is a Christian believer in Our Lord, Jesus Christ. He decided to be baptized at age fifteen (15). He was baptized at Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church by one of his mentors, Pastor Dr. John Norwood (deceased). Pastor Norwood has a street named after him in Evanston, IL where he was also a Police Chaplain. As a young man in high school James created a program called "The Right Steps." The program combined Bible study and football training for inner city "at risk" young boys. He was the Bible teacher and the football trainer of "The Right Steps" program. He also counseled the boys on how to resist gang involvement.

When not working during summers, James organized extra football practices for his team at Glenbrook North High School in Northbrook, IL. James received many athletic scholarship offers from Division One Colleges

and Universities in spite of his smaller size as a running back. James traveled with David, my new husband, to visit many football college programs.

By this time, I remarried Dr. David Claerbaut, a college professor, former coach and businessman. James and I moved into a more stable household in David's home. Shortly after David welcomed Christopher, James' older brother, to also reside in our home. For several years David was a volunteer assistant pastor in the church we all attended. The church had many activities and events that provided a wholesome environment for our family. James and David had a close father-son relationship. David never introduced James as his stepson. He always introduced James as his son. He was proud of James. Dr. David, as we all called him, was a good role model. He also helped James maneuver through the college football recruiting process. It takes a special man to fill a father's shoes.

During his undergraduate years at Harvard, James worked a part time job for an organization that helped prevent the rape of female students. James has been a philanthropist as far back as during his undergraduate years. He participates in numerous charitable organizations. James worked all through his undergraduate years, as we were not able to finance his education. James worked as an intern for **Goldman Sachs** during summers while he was at Harvard. He was later offered a permanent position with Goldman Sachs. Each of his brothers and sisters financed their own college education. All five are professionals.

James recently worked on a plan for one of his nieces who was having a difficult time deciding what to do after high school. She did not wish to continue at college. James assessed her skills and found a training program in the Atlanta, GA area that would allow her to learn business computer skills. He made all arrangements for her to begin this short-term program and obtain a job upon completion. At the time this niece decided to pursue a different path, but she was very grateful for James' offer. James cares about helping young people to make career decisions.

James graduated from Harvard with a bachelor's degree in 2007. He also completed his master's degree at Columbia University in Financial Engineering. In 2009 James married a good, educated Christian woman from a military family, Maria Toler, now Maria Velissaris. Maria has always been a healthy, positive, Christian influence in our family. They are blessed to have each other, as husband and wife. James and Maria recently traveled to the holy lands in the Middle East to experience what many say is an ultimate Christian experience. They walked where Jesus had walked.

My husband, Dr. David Claerbaut, passed away during December of 2021. David's death was totally unexpected James flew to my residence city. I was so distraught; I was unable to do anything at the time. James and his siblings made all arrangements for David's memorial and burial.

James Velissaris has no criminal history or record. He has been an honest, law abiding, taxpayer citizen. Without James his family and his community will experience a tremendous loss. I love James and am very proud of the man that he has become. He is always concerned for his fellow man, whether related to him or a stranger. He follows the commandment, "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

Sincerely,
Rita (formerly Velissaris) Claerbaut, mother of James Velissaris

Rita Claerbaut

Exhibit A-3

Rochelle Claerbaut

Brooklyn, NY [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

January 17, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Court Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10017

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris 1:22-cr-00105-DLC

Dear Judge Cote,

Thank you for allowing those of us who know and love James the opportunity to share with you who he is and ask that you extend him grace.

One of the most difficult things to hear at James' plea hearing was that he [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (his 38th birthday was mere months ago, [REDACTED]) [REDACTED] is not surprising, but the realization is painful to confront. I've heard shocking stories about the abuse he experienced in his childhood home, which I will not repeat out of respect for his privacy. James' entire childhood was marred and defined by living in an unsafe and hostile environment. This would shape the way James relates to people and himself.

I do not believe James has ever internalized the love that others have for him, instead believing that he is unworthy. He rarely shares his troubles, believing that he is a burden and not understanding that we who love him have an active desire to support him and to know what is causing him pain. If James is in trouble, he is not likely to ask for help. He didn't even ask me to write this letter.

James came into my life when he was around 15 years old and I was 29. (For clarity, I will refer to James as my stepbrother, and our dad as my dad, although we do not make these distinctions in our family. In our hearts, James and I are brother and sister and David Claerbaut is our dad.)

Our father, my biological dad (David Claerbaut), married James' mother (Rita Velissaris) when James was in high school and I was a flight attendant, soon to become a law student. Although extremely introverted and young enough to be my son, we bonded almost immediately. Always sweet and kind, James quickly became one of my favorite people.

James grew into a kind, loving, generous, humble, serious man. Despite the burden of his upbringing, James managed to have a very successful life. Intelligent, serious, and hard working James managed to earn degrees from Harvard and Columbia Universities and have a mostly successful career in the extremely competitive world of finance.

At twenty-four in New York City—handsome, and financially secure—others in his position would have been partying and running wild. James got married. He chose a highly-educated career woman from a military family with a strong Christian faith. Fourteen years later, she remains by his side through this extremely difficult time. James' choice of partner and commitment to her say quite a bit about his values.

James and my dad were very close. A professor, published author of more than 15 titles, and devout Christian who walked the walk and did not merely talk about his faith, my dad was a key figure in James' life. Rather than attempt to describe my dad or the relationship he had with James, I invite you to search David Claerbaut on the internet. You will find his books, his website, his wikipedia page—which should provide some unbiased insight into the type of man he was. You will also find “Recruiting Confidential”, my dad’s account of his relationship with James and their experience navigating college recruitment. There, you will find stories about James told by a man with no blood ties or agenda that would bias his assessment of him.

We lost my father suddenly at the end of 2021. This was a crushing blow, especially for James and me. And it tore our family apart.

Without James’ kindness and support, I do not know if I would still have my health or my job as I have been navigating my grief. It took tremendous strength of character for James to support me the way he has. My father’s passing was devastating. And it was unnecessary. Some members of our family were extremely insensitive to me in the wake of my loss. And some of them bear some responsibility for what happened. James could have avoided contact with me—most certainly the easy choice considering what happened—out of guilt, shame, or defense of family. But he was loving, supportive, affirming, kind, never defensive—even when listening to things that must have been hard to hear. He did not abandon me, silence me, or try to persuade me to feel differently about what happened. He listened, supported, loved, and affirmed me. For that, I will always be grateful.

When planning Dad’s memorial, it was James’ idea to honor my father by sharing some of his letters to us over the years. This was perfect. I wish I had thought of it. Below is one of Dad’s letters to James and Maria. I offer it here, because these are the heartfelt words of a father to a son not many years ago, but before James’ legal troubles, written free of bias or agenda by a man who knew and loved James and would have wanted you to know how special he is.

Dear Maria and James,

There are few things about which I am more thankful on this holiday than I am for each of you.

I am so grateful for who each of you are.

Maria, I am so thankful for having you in my life, and more importantly, in the life of James. I told you last Christmas that you are one of the reasons I sleep well. I know firsthand, through Rita, the amazing blessing of having a loving wife of the finest Christian character. She is one of the greatest blessings of my life and you are that to James.

James, I am so proud of the young man you have become—doing so amid a myriad of adversities—many of them emotional in nature. I also know firsthand

how difficult those can be. Many get resolved, some linger, and new ones can emerge, but your faith and humility will continue to insulate you from their negative effects. I have watched you carefully and I am so happy with what I see—your loving spirit and you making the right decisions in so many areas of your life.

I am at a stage of life in which I have peace and joy. I am extremely thankful for so many things. You two are chief among them.

Love,
Dad

Finally, I humbly ask that you find it in your heart to extend grace to my family. Losing my father has been extremely difficult. Losing James—and so soon thereafter—is almost too much to bear. I have only just started to learn how to manage my grief for my father. Not only is James dear to me, but he has been my main source of support through this time. Losing him would be devastating.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully,
Rochelle Claerbaut

Exhibit A-4

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

January 15, 2023

Re: U.S. v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote,

First and foremost, I truly appreciate your time and willingness to gain some additional perspective about James Velissaris from those that know him. My name is Chris Velissaris, and I am James' brother. I am only two years older than James, so we have been incredibly close from childhood, and I have had the joy of being able to call him my brother and best friend. James is a hard-working, faith-driven man whose loyalty and support only underscores his incredibly humble and compassionate heart. These qualities budded at a young age, matured throughout his older years amidst any adversity that came his way, and persists even today when coping with this current situation.

With five kids (three older siblings) and very little money, we learned early on that success was not defined by material things. We had to move frequently around Chicago and suburbs due to our now estranged father's issues keeping steady employment and were often the extreme minority in mostly white schools. Our mother is black and grew up in Civil Rights era middle America, so she was accustomed to the inherent social injustices that existed but was nevertheless consistent in encouraging us to work harder than everyone else so that we could achieve anything we set our minds towards doing. I cannot say that I consistently followed this guidance until later in life, but from a young age James' incredible work ethic and discipline was very apparent. James and I took the train to our middle school in Evanston, IL for a couple years and I clearly recall some classmates picking on us for us doing our homework on the way home from school on a Friday. Unfortunately, this type of peer pressure worked on me, the paperwork sheepishly went right back into my backpack, but not so for James. He remained steadfast in his commitment to his studies because he figured we might as well maximize our time on the train by knocking out some schoolwork. This passionate work ethic carried through high school where James was an excellent student and earned a 35 on his ACT to help grant admission to Harvard, through earning his undergraduate and master's degrees, and later his hard-working approach was a key factor enabling James to excel professionally. But while much of James' perseverance was learned behavior, he would be the first to admit that his faith drives a belief in hard work being the "right" approach to honor God.

We did not grow up "in the church", as many others do. We did go to church, just not consistently over the years. Thus, it surprised me to see James decide to get baptized as a young man entering high school and truly become a believer in Christ. I was not in the same boat at the time, but James had a wonderful knack for being patient and understanding while still trying to gently encourage me to pursue something more than my narrow view of what was fun for me at the time. James did not judge. He loved me, he encouraged me, he prayed for me, and a few years later I would get baptized myself at age 20. Much has happened in the 20 years since that point and of course none of us are flawless (and many of us far from it), but James' faith and commitment to walking with God the best that he can has been an integral part of his identity ever since.

Between James' hard-working spirit and natural-born talent, he excelled at sports. He was even able to join his football prowess, his passion for God, and his entrepreneurial spirit together when he initiated a program for youths to merge learning football with bible study affiliated with a Chicagoland church and local businesses. Football became his primary athletic pursuit in high school at Glenbrook North in Northbrook, IL, where he was the captain of the football team and set numerous school records causing the colleges to heavily recruit him. Our stepfather, Dr. David Claerbaut, entered our lives during this period as our mother remarried David when James was 16. David had been an accomplished professor, published author, volunteer talking pastor, and several other achievements that he was far too humble to discuss openly. At its simplest, he was a good man. David and James spent countless hours discussing sports, family, faith, love, and more during their time living together including on football recruiting trips. Roughly 20 years later, David died from COVID in

December 2021. James has been key among all of us to help support our Mom in any way possible through her grief management and health support since she will be 73 this year, but among the most painful remnants is James being unable to have his multi-hour conversations with David about many of the same topics discussed decades prior, some of which are chronicled in David's book *Recruiting Confidential: A Father, a Son, and Big Time College Football* (2003). As Barry Temkin of the Chicago Tribune described James from the book review, "Velissaris emerges as an honest, if taciturn, soul in a somewhat dishonest world." This description resonates as a remarkably concise and accurate description of James that extends far beyond his time deciding on colleges.

Harvard is never "easy", but James did very well honing in on his passion for economics and mathematics, playing football for all four years on the Harvard football team, working part time to earn as much as possible to help pay for his education, and to give back the little time left over to his church and organizations like the Harvard group preventing campus rape which James volunteered at. Football was a challenge for James as he struggled with the fact that he was not starting (or even playing) in most games given the other talent on the team, a situation where many folks would take a step away, but James honored his commitment to ensure that he "played" all four years at Harvard and gave them everything he had even if only in practices. As he segued into a career in finance beginning at Goldman Sachs, James did not take shortcuts to his success. He started as an intern, then an analyst putting in 80-hour work weeks, and slowly but surely worked his way up the ranks. He only changed companies a couple times in his career in association with advancement opportunities, but before you knew it his hard work had paid off as he was running Infinity Q in his 30s. This advancement was even more impressive because James never wanted to "fit" within the stereotypically loosely moralized finance boys' club. He holds a strong moral compass, is faithfully committed to his wife, and he has never valued the pursuit of material things. Those are three characteristics that unfortunately fit very few folks in that sphere. But James did not care to fit in, he believes that you do not have to conform to succeed. He met his wife Maria while still early in his career, and the two have since grown together as one while retaining their uniqueness in a wonderful way. In fact, if not for Maria I would never have known about many of James' worldly successes in his business life.

The reality of the situation is that James has never been truly driven by the money, or by the prestige, or awards, or stuff. I fully recognize how that notion seems to contradict the charges at hand, but nevertheless it is wholly the truth. James' humble nature has meant that our family would very rarely know about his business successes, and when we did it was Maria who let us know because James did not care to talk about himself. When he did, he commonly downplayed accomplishments that most others would be bragging about. And this, Your Honor, is perhaps one of the more troublesome aspects from my view. Not that James has lost the career that he spent decades working tirelessly towards achieving, as he does not value the material pursuits and remained on the outside of the finance insider's club. Not being in an earthly hell over the last 1-2 years, as unsurprisingly he has kept that burden to himself to avoid bringing others down. It is the potential perception for folks to think that he acts without integrity. Those of us who know James do not give a second thought to this possibility, as James has proven his commitment to being a hard-working, honest, and humble servant dedicated to showing God's love through his words and actions. This is the James that we all know. He is my first-born daughter's Godfather, and there is no other person in the world that I would trust more to guide my children if anything were to ever happen to me and my wife. I hope that Your Honor can gain some insight into who my brother is from this letter and others to help bridge the gap between what is outlined in the case and the James that we all love, support, and trust. Thank you for your time and consideration of James' character when deliberating over appropriate sentencing.

Sincerely,

Chris Velissaris

DocuSigned by:

Chris Velissaris
0C60AF4B1A724D7...

Chicago, IL

Exhibit A-5

Dear Judge Cote,

I'm writing to tell you about my brother in law James Velissaris. I've known James for 6 years, he's my husband, Chris Velissaris's younger brother. Before I met James I heard about him from Chris, about his impressive ivy league schooling and his finance career in New York. As if that wasn't intimidating enough he was also the closest person to my husband, the one I knew I needed to win over. The first time I met James was at their sister's wedding, I didn't know what to expect, I suppose I thought he would be a snob or a judgmental New York elitist. For all of the pomp and circumstance surrounding him he wasn't portentous at all, he was kind, reserved and polite.

My first Christmas with their family James brought gifts for all of his sisters, and he got me the same gift. I was so touched by the simple act of kindness, it made me feel like part of the family. As time went on I got to know James a little better every time he would come to visit us. Aside from being super smart and accomplished he is just a nice decent guy. When Chris and I became pregnant with our daughter we went to New Jersey to visit James and his wife Maria. James knew that I had really wanted to go to Brooklyn since I'd never gone before. I'm from Chicago and I didn't know how far Brooklyn was from their home, but he took us in an hour Uber ride both ways because he knew that's what I wanted to do. It was so thoughtful and I'm sure it was the last thing he wanted to do on his day off.

We have so much love and respect for him that we asked James to be our daughter's Godfather as well as giving her his name as her middle name. A couple weeks after we asked James to be Godfather I got a message from him explaining that he couldn't take a vow to be our daughter's Christian guide knowing that I wasn't Christian myself. I was surprised because I don't think I've ever met anyone that takes their Godfather/mother vow that seriously. But that's the kind of person he is, honest to a fault. I know that must have been very hard for him considering how close he is with his brother, how much he loves his niece and cherishes Christianity. I know he wanted to be her Godfather, and for the record he still has the unofficial role of Godfather. He's always been very considerate of our daughter. When [REDACTED] was born as a gift he sent a subscription of diapers for a year and some clothes that he personally picked out. But the bigger point I'd like to make is that James is a good person with an even greater heart., I only know my brother in law to be a lovely, humble humble who deserves mercy. I hope that you will see him the same way we do. Thank you.

Lisa Raich



Exhibit A-6

Christine Aceron

[REDACTED]
Oak Park, IL

January 14, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

Allow me to introduce myself, Your Honor. I am Christine Aceron, an older sister of James Velissaris. I lived with my brother from his birth until I left the family home after I graduated from high school. I have always enjoyed a close sibling relationship with James from childhood, into his teenage and college years, and throughout our respective adulthoods. James is one of those incredibly special and loving people who makes this world a truly better place. I believe James has touched this world with his impact as a philanthropist, his intelligence, and his warmth and kindness. James is a man of God, with strong faith and devotion. He has a love for people of all backgrounds. He has respect for differing viewpoints and religions. James has strong morality. He is among the absolute best and most genuine human beings that I have ever known.

James is a self-starter with an incredibly strong work ethic. He had very demanding career roles and a schedule that required him to stay connected with work while on vacation. James gracefully managed his responsibilities and would arrive at a family gathering, or dinner with his wife Maria, with a smile and with his full presence. Most people that I know would complain or find a reason not to show up, but this is not James' approach. James has always given top effort and brought the right intentions to his work life and his personal life. James' free time is often dedicated to charitable organizations that improve the lives of women and children, in addition to sponsoring scholarships for young men and young women in need.

James generously shares his time and talents with his nieces and nephews. In 2019, I wanted to bring my two high school aged children to the East Coast to tour colleges. I am a single parent with a heavy financial burden, and at the time I could barely afford the trip. James made our trip possible by hosting all three of us at his home and helping me pay for some of the expenses. This was a huge act that had ripple effects on my children. If it weren't for James' generosity and kindness, my kids would not have visited six of the universities on their combined list. They would have missed the chance to attend in-person tours before making a selection. Most schools stopped scheduling tours a few months later, at the start of the pandemic. This trip was pivotal for my daughter and son to rank their top choices, and each decide which university to attend. I did not have to choose between covering my day-to-day living expenses or bringing my kids on a highly anticipated college tour. The reason I did not have to make that difficult choice is because my brother James was there for us, and he did not hesitate to help us. While we stayed at his home, James spent a significant amount of time during his evenings and weekend talking with my kids and answering their numerous questions about his college experience. He shared great information on the college athlete recruiting process with my daughter, who was deciding whether to continue her sport in college. There is

so much good knowledge and perspective that James gave to my kids during their high school years and into college. We needed this because James' experiences were much broader than my own.

I am especially appreciative to James for being a positive male role model to my son and my daughter. I know the person James is. I know his high integrity and his character. I consider James to be an excellent role model and I would never hesitate to have my name associated with his. James is the type of person who thinks of others before he thinks of his needs. He is humorous and bright, a great listener, and the absolute best family-oriented person and friend to those who know him well. I consider James to be wise. He has given me great advice on my own relationships. Through those conversations, I was continuously impressed by how compassionate James is. He has looked out for me even though I am nine years older than him. I would love to see James' honorable deeds and good nature recognized. He has a large heart and I believe he will keep improving other peoples' lives every year.

James and I grew up modestly, but we attended outstanding schools where we gained a strong education. We often were the only Black student in a classroom, and later became the minority in the board room. James did not have the luxury of a network of friends and colleagues who were "part of the club". He is a self-made man who is transparent and who works extremely hard. James has very high standards for himself and for others. He is the hardest on himself. I have always found James to be honest and practical in his actions. I trust James completely. If I could not be around to handle something important for our family, I would want James to manage it because I know he would be dedicated and fair.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and better understand James.

Sincerely,
Christine Aceron

Christine Aceron

Exhibit A-7

Jailyn Aceron
Oak Park, IL

January 17, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

My name is Jailyn. I am one of James' nieces. While I have known my uncle my entire life, our bond has grown even stronger throughout my years of high school and college. I look to my uncle as a role model because he was the first person in our family to graduate from an Ivy League school. Ever since I was little, I would hear stories about him earning a scholarship for football, which helped him get into Harvard. As another student-athlete, this was very respectable and motivating.

My Uncle James is a kind soul who always thinks of his family. During my junior year, I was overwhelmed with the college application process. As the oldest sister in my family, I did not have an older sibling to look to for advice on these things. I needed guidance to help me determine which school was the best fit for me. Thanks to my uncle, I was fortunate enough to visit each school of interest and more on the East Coast. My Uncle James kindly offered us to stay in his home during our trip. Without his help, I would not have been able to tour these schools in person. He also took the time to show us around Times Square in New York City. Quality time with my family means everything to me. I am so blessed to have these memories with my uncle. Although I did not decide to attend one of the schools on the East Coast, my Uncle James and this trip inspired me to be open to new experiences.

Throughout the past few years of college, my uncle has continued to make new experiences and quality time with our family happen most humbly. We've visited the Georgia Aquarium, a dine-in movie theater, and he has even taken my friends and me to my first football game. These are experiences that I will never forget, and I hope we can continue to make memories like these in the near future.

Thank you so much.

Sincerely,
Jailyn Aceron

Exhibit A-8

January 14, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

My name is Michael and I am James' nephew. Me and my uncle have always had a special type of bond. He would relate to me on things other adults wouldn't. We would talk about Batman, video games, and other things that I was a nerd over. He wanted me to feel welcome and secure in who I was. Compared to other family members. My uncle James and I had a very distinct, understanding connection.

My uncle James has been a very positive figure in my life, despite me not deserving it. Growing up, I would get into trouble a lot. I was an attention-seeker and many of my family members would chew me out because of my childish behavior. My uncle James, however, was very patient with me. Even when I was being disrespectful, he was not harsh with me but demonstrated that the ways I acted were unnecessary. He is definitely capable of being a mentor and someone who can help others.

My uncle James is encouraging. He knows what to say to help bring people out of a slump and be positive. When I was younger, I had the ISAT testing for my school. He wrote to me and told me that "God is holding me in his hand," which helped motivate me to perform well and has stuck with me ever since.

At the end of the day, my uncle James is someone who through observing, has made me a better person. He is someone who puts the needs of others above those of his own and does not complain about it. He has a friendly laugh that cheers me up. My uncle James is a good man who elevates those around him and contributes a lot without receiving much in return.

Thank you so much.

Yours truly,

[REDACTED]

Exhibit A-9

January 15, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

My name is Dennis Aceron, Brother-in-Law of James Velissaris. I've known James since he was a young boy in grammar school. I've always thought of James as a respectful and moral person. His loyalty and dedication to his family and friends is largely due to his Christian upbringing. He is a selfless and loving man that I'm proud to call my Brother. I'll always be grateful for his support of my family.

Sincerely,

Dennis L. Aceron

Exhibit A-10

January 11, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

My name is Rachel Germann. James Velissaris is my baby brother and I have known him his whole life.

James was born into a difficult family situation. His biological father (our mother's second husband) was abusive and often unemployed. That caused many hardships for our family – financially, mentally, physically and spiritually. Feast or famine was how things were then. There were new clothes and shoes one month. And we would be evicted or have the utilities turned off the next. We ate a lot of beans and rice and sometimes even ketchup sandwiches. James still has a tendency to just drink hot water with nothing in it – something he acquired a taste for when we couldn't afford to buy tea, lemon or honey.

During those hard times, we looked to our mother for direction and she always insisted we have the best education available to us. Often this led to us – a black and mixed family – living in the most modest areas of predominantly white neighborhoods. Sometimes we did not fit in, for racial, social or financial reasons. But Mom pushed us to do our best in school and James excelled at that. After James' biological father and our mother divorced, she continued to advocate for her children to make sure her kids were treated fairly in school.

When David Claerbaut (Mom's late husband of over 20 years) came into our lives, James was in his teens. He did well in school and sports. And under Mom's and David's guidance, James became involved in church and developed a relationship with God. He thrived with the spiritual direction and stability that came during this time. His success in school, sports and a spiritual focus allowed him to earn scholarships to college. We were not rich, so he needed those scholarships. He also worked through college to help fund his education.

James met his wife Maria in college. They became an unstoppable force together. They supported one another as they advanced their education and carved out successful careers. With their faith a priority in their lives, they chose to do philanthropic work, sharing their blessings with others who are less fortunate.

To this day, James makes sure to honor our mother and David out of love and gratitude for what they gave him. James was especially enthusiastic in making arrangements for Mom's 70th birthday. I treasure a video I have of them dancing together at her party. When David passed away in December 2021, James spoke at the memorial services about the special relationship they had. And he helped Mom with her subsequent move.

Despite adversity, James remains a faithful husband, a steadfast Christian believer, a loving son/brother/uncle and a good and honest man. I hope that you see the good man he is.

Sincerely,


Rachel Germann

Exhibit A-11

Dear Judge Cote,

I hope this letter finds you well, thank you for taking the time to read this as I'm sure you have a busy schedule. My uncle James is one of the most inspiring people I know. I remember as a kid until now, hearing about childhood stories from when my aunts and uncles were small and of some of the challenges they had to overcome. While all of them have become successful, it's my Uncle James' story that showed me how truly anything is possible if you put your mind to it.

When my uncle's generation were young, they had faced circumstances of poverty, and at times homelessness. Out of these situations, my Uncle James, because of the strength of his mind, climbed his way up and got a full-ride football scholarship from Harvard University. During this time, he was still working while going through school and was actively speaking out on violence against women. From there, he set his next course to going into wealth management and soon became successful in that as well. He later went on to become a film producer in order to shed light on the black experience and increase diversity on the screen. Seeing him create his life as something that most people simply sit at home and wish for has shown not only me, but all of his nieces and nephews, that you can accomplish whatever you desire with God's grace and a strong mind.

Kind regards,

Elise Jackson

Exhibit A-12

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

January 17, 2023

Re: U.S. v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote,

My name is Anthony Germann and I am the brother in-law of James Velissaris. I have known James for about 10 years - since about the time my wife and I started dating. James is one remarkable man. I first realized it following one of my first conversations I had with him regarding how happy he was to see joy and happiness return to his sister's life. She had a number of unfortunate circumstances in her life prior to her and I dating and eventually marrying. Personally, it resonated to me how much love he has for his family. I have seen time and time again him putting that love into action. I recall one recent conversation we had with him where he wanted to help in a most generous manner to provide assistance with my step-daughter's education. I also observed the support he recently provided to his mother following the passing of her husband. It is a generosity that I can only hope to come close to emulating.

Sincerely,



Anthony Germann
Stone Mountain, GA

Exhibit A-13

The Honorable Denise L. Cote

January 16, 2023

United States District Judge

Southern District of New York

500 Pearl Street

New York, NY 10007

RE: U.S. v Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote,

I am writing on behalf of my brother, James Velissaris, over whose case you are presiding. My understanding of the intention behind this communication is that it provides insight into his character, rather than the merits of his case. As such, I would like to share some personal accounts of our lives together and describe who James has been to me.

Our mother raised five children, including many years without the help of a spouse. She was always hard-working and willing to juggle multiple jobs to provide for her family. Though often used, we did not have much, but we were a close-knit family and always had each-other.

My older sisters left for school and life outside of the home and for a while it was just us three boys and our mother. Being a few years older, I would take on tasks such as taking my brothers to school, preparing meals, helping with homework, laundry, etc. We were nomads of sorts, living for a time with family, then moving to a hotel, then to an apartment, then back with family. It was this way for a couple of years, but somehow it worked, even if only because we had no other option. During this period, I grew tremendously close to Chris and James.

We traveled 75 minutes to school each way via public transportation, which provided ample opportunity for small talk and deep discussions. Through those conversations, and even at a young age, James showed himself to be thoughtful, caring, considerate of others, honest, humble, and intelligent. He cared about the world around him and always put others needs ahead of his own. For an elementary school aged boy, that's saying a lot. He was fiercely devoted to Mom and in small ways made sure she was ok. Honestly, he was probably better at that than me or Chris. It could have been the age difference, but I believe that's just how he operates.

Around this time, James found his way to organized sports. That would have probably come sooner, but separation, divorce and the life interruptions that follow took priority for some of those years. I remember the first practice I took him to in Chicago for youth Rocket Football. After a quick chat about what to expect for the season, the coaches sent the team running around the field. This was the first time I saw his speed on full display. He finished the run in almost half the time of the rest of the team. From there, it was awesome to witness his athleticism from game to game. Nearly every time he would touch the ball, he would find his way to the endzone. He was playing at a different level than the competition, but that never changed who he was or how he treated people. On and off the field he was an encouraging teammate, humble and hard working.

A year or so passed and one day my mother told me that "the boys", Chris and James, were moving in with their father about 40 minutes away. I don't remember the circumstances, possibly something lobbied for by their father, or maybe Mom decided she wanted help or even a case of growing boys wanting to spread their wings. Nonetheless, it cut her deep and she was visibly saddened for some time. Though we saw each-other less, in some ways we packed more into our time together. James was in the early years of high school and figuring out life with a wider perspective. He was becoming more studious and being recognized for his academics in addition to his sports prowess. Even though he was a high schooler, he was mature beyond his years in certain ways, thinking about his future with a growing clarity.

However, life at home with his father was not so great, and I found out that he was really leaning into sports, extracurriculars and academics as an escape from that environment. James is dark skinned with an ambiguous ethnic appearance and Chris is fair skinned and more closely resembles his father, a fact that he made both boys unnecessarily and critically aware of. He also made James feel unwanted in other ways that no parent ever should think, let alone verbalize. Around this time, my mother began a relationship with Dr. David Claerbaut, a man who would have a profound impact on all our lives, especially James's. David had a larger-than-life personality and along with that immense love for the unwanted. As an adopted child, he was aware of the tremendous impact that a loving and nurturing home could have on one's life and he worked hard to show all of us how much we meant to him and how willing he was to take us in with open arms. It was no surprise when late in high school, James decided he wanted to move back with Mom and now David.

David was a sports nut and he and James were able to quickly bond through that shared love. I think James also appreciated the stability and parenting style David provided. And for David, all of us kids offered that chance to expand his family, again speaking to his adoptive roots. When James's school had a parent appreciation night in his final year of High School football, James chose to honor David, which I believe further cemented their relationship.

When I heard James was going to attend Harvard, I was proud, excited and eager for what his future held. I knew it would not be an easy road, but knowing his work ethic and steadfast dedication to achieve what he intended, was not at all concerned about the outcome. During that time, I became engaged and was planning my wedding with my fiancée and of course James would be a groomsman. Our wedding date was only four months after our engagement, so things were happening at a feverish pace. James let me know that because the football team had a game that weekend, he would not be able to attend since he had already committed to that prior to me announcing my wedding. I was a little shocked and honestly upset, but after thinking it over I understood that was who he was; a man who honored his commitments. Thankfully his coach was a family man and allowed him to attend regardless of that fact.

After several years, James told me he had met a wonderful, beautiful, faith-filled woman and was planning to get married. I was excited, but also curious to meet the person who had taken my brother's heart. What was she like, would they be compatible, did she love him like he loved her, etc.? I quickly found out she was indeed the real deal when I visited him in New York and my wife, and I spent the weekend with them. They showed us all around the town and I could see how great of a fit they were for each other. They both were wildly intelligent and ambitious, but also grounded.

When I found out my wife was pregnant with my son, James was one of the first calls I received. In his understated way, he congratulated me and asked all the obligatory questions, but also in some special way, conveyed the love a relative or close friend can have for another's child without even meeting them. I knew he would always care for my son like he was one of his own.

I know I've said a lot. Maybe too much in some ways, maybe not enough in other ways, but I wanted to express who I know my brother to be and the man he is today. I know him to be honest, caring, supportive, humble, straightforward. James is a person of faith and forthrightness. I pray that this letter will provide some meaningful insight into his personality and that you consider this in your sentencing.

Sincerely,



Marshall Downs

Coloma, MI

Exhibit A-14

Benita Burke Toler, Ed.D.

Atlanta, Georgia

January 30, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Court Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, New York 10007

Re: U. S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

I am writing this letter to request leniency with the sentencing of my son-in-law, James Velissaris.

I am a retired public-school administrator with a background as an elementary education teacher, curriculum writer, assistant principal, and hearing officer working in the office of the superintendent. I have known James for over 13 years and considered it an honor when he asked my husband and me for our only daughter's hand in marriage. He was immediately and consistently embraced by my family. My personal relationship with James has always been one of mutual respect. I admired his high level of loving, caring, selfless support given to my daughter as they worked together to build a strong marriage.

Understanding his humble beginnings and tremendous level of intelligence, James graduated at the top of his class from both Harvard and Columbia Universities. He used his success to mentor family members and other college students, exposing them to opportunities denied to himself during his formative years. James has always been responsible and dependable exercising a profound following of Christian principles. In fact, his first date with my daughter was an evening in church. In turn, he intellectually supported charities, including one where I serve on the Board of Directors. He provided technical assistance and taught us how to develop a sustainable resource development program.

James was instrumental in [REDACTED] and coordinating my relocation from Virginia to Georgia. He has always been tremendously invested in improving life circumstances for others thru education and other forms of advocacy. He has been a kind, caring, giving, gentle, inspiring, and compassionate son-in-law and friend to my family, friends, and others.

In closing, James possesses countless redeeming qualities and has much to positively contribute to mankind. I humbly thank you for considering my request to grant him leniency and a much desired second chance.

Sincerely,


Benita B. Toler

Exhibit A-15

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

January 23, 2023

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris

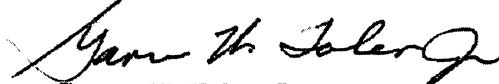
Dear Judge Cote,

The purpose of this correspondence is to request leniency on behalf of James Velissaris. My name is Garvis W. Toler, Jr., James' father-in-law. I am a retired U.S. Army officer who also taught secondary school mathematics for several years following my retirement. I have known James for over 13 years and have had frequent contact with him during that period.

I know James to be a devoted Christian who lives his faith. He has maintained an on-line affiliation with Alfred Street Baptist Church in VA and financially supports their ministries. James' dedication to moral living became clear to me in a situation several years ago. James came to me and asked for my approval for him to marry my daughter. After I agreed, he and my daughter began planning their wedding and new life together. The apartment they sought became available months before the wedding, causing a problem. Should they "live in sin" or lose the apartment. James chose a Christian solution and insisted that they have a civil wedding ceremony immediately to avoid compromising his moral standards. That type of behavior is why he is trusted and admired.

I know James to be extremely intelligent, hardworking and unselfish. When I first met James, I sought to find out as much about him as possible. I discovered that despite humble beginnings, he put forth extraordinary effort to excel in both academics and athletics. As a result, he was able to attend Harvard, where he also played football. Later James used his success to help others. He mentored promising students and provided internship opportunities to spur their development. He also set up a foundation to provide scholarships to undergraduates. He is determined to "give back" and make a positive contribution to his fellow man.

James has unlimited potential to make the world a better place. He should be allowed to continue his efforts at the earliest possible time. He is loved and cherished by many and I personally feel blessed that he is part of my family. Thank you for considering my request.,



Garvis W. Toler, Jr.
Atlanta, GA



Exhibit A-16

Nikhil Mirchandani
New York, NY

January 22, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

I write this letter on behalf of James Velissaris as Your Honor considers his sentencing. I have known James since 2005 and have a picture of his character that could be helpful in providing a more holistic view of him as a person. In my experience, James has consistently been a humble and generous person who worked diligently and was truly grateful for his opportunities in life.

Since meeting in 2005 at Harvard College, James and I have remained good friends. We were roommates in college from 2005 through graduation in 2007 and were roommates in New York City until he met his wife in 2008-2009. In college and since, James has been anything but the typical Harvard-turned-hedge-fund story of privilege and entitlement.

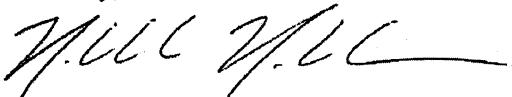
James came from humble beginnings in a mixed race family that considered Harvard a distant dream. His athletic talents as a star high school football running back and academic talents as an advanced mathematics and economics student gave him an opportunity to consider elite schools as a high school senior. Throughout the time I've known him, he would regularly give thanks for his good fortune and express a desire to help others experience similar educational opportunities. His actions often spoke even louder than these words. He worked hard to maintain a rigorous schedule of varsity football practice, economics course work, jobs to help afford school, and social personal life including Bible study and more mundane chats with friends. To my mind, he was a man with maturity and purpose – he showed the work ethic of someone granted a special opportunity that he wanted to embrace and maximize.

As James moved from college into the workforce, his work ethic continued but also began to broaden in its ultimate goals. While he would still devour any reading materials he could get his hands on about economics and financial markets, putting himself through a master's course at Columbia in limited free time, he would more regularly talk about how he wanted to share his good fortunes. He was generous with his time and money, trying to mentor undergraduate and recent graduate students from underprivileged backgrounds like his own with interests in financial markets. In some more private moments, he would tell close friends that "there's no real purpose in making money if you can't give back and help people." From my experience and knowledge of him as a person, I did not doubt his sincerity.

Reading the news of James's legal case in the public press and watching the speed at which some outlets have rushed to tear down a caricature of Wall Street, elite school greed and pride has brought me considerable sadness. I have been in both of these worlds for long enough to know the typical characters.

James was, in his personal life, a rare example of a humble and generous person from a decidedly non-traditional background who rose to acclaim in both of these worlds. He is and was one of the good people, one whose combination of talent and outlook could still do a lot of good things for our society if granted the opportunity. I hope Your Honor will consider these positives as you review his case.

Sincerely,



Nikhil Mirchandani
New York

Exhibit A-17

January 24, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street, New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

I write in support of my friend James Velissaris. When James and I met in 2004 as college sophomores, he immediately struck me as a unique and special person: a formidable football player who nonetheless shared my nerdy enthusiasm for statistical models. After I got to know him and appreciate his big-heartedness and compassion, we elected to live in neighboring dorm rooms. And when we both moved to New York City after graduation, James became one of my closest friends. He remains so to this day.

Although James played on the football team, he never allowed himself to be defined as a football player. He had an unusually diverse and eclectic group of friends. Although outgoing himself, he had many friends like M. – a shy, astrophysics major. Whenever M. came out with us, James would make sure he introduced M. to everyone. And if M. was too shy to talk about his own accomplishments, that was fine; James was happy to do it for him. James was always looking out for his friends like that.

When I went through a particularly difficult breakup, James would come by my room and listen to my tales of woe with a patience and intensity uncommon among adults and vanishingly rare among college students. Through those conversations, James helped build back my self-confidence. Other evenings, he'd come by with his wide, warm smile and talk me into going out to make sure I'd be surrounded by friends.

Nothing has been given to James in his life, and – even on a campus full of driven students – his work ethic stood out. Other football players would tell me how, while everyone else was goofing off on the team bus, James would be busy studying. I got to witness his academic determination firsthand when we took an economics class together our senior year; James was always prepared to ask the professor an insightful question or to challenge an idea. Despite James' commitment to academics, he never bragged about, or even revealed, his grades. In fact, it wasn't until years later that I learned about James' impressive GPA.

James defies labels. He is a deeply loyal and supportive friend. He is hard-working yet humble. While I don't know the details of his crime, I cannot believe the world would be best served with him behind bars. The world needs more people like James; his generosity and warmth are contagious and a force for good.

Sincerely,


Frederick Goldberg

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Address: Hartsdale, NY

Exhibit A-18

January 24, 2023

Honorable Judge Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

I am writing this letter to provide a character reference for James Velissaris in his upcoming sentencing hearing. I have known James since he started dating his now-wife Maria in 2008. Maria and I have been friends since we were 18-year-old college freshmen in 1998; I am proud to call James and Maria two of my dearest and closest friends. I have come to know James as a kind, compassionate and faith-filled individual.

James is a family-oriented person who puts his wife Maria and their families first. He is committed to his faith and his church, and he is a respected leader in the African-American community. James is constantly working to help his community and those around him, including through scholarships he has established, mentorship and countless volunteer activities.

During difficult times, James has been a great support to me and a loyal friend. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] James and Maria were steadfast friends throughout this period, and my husband and I were always welcome in their home without reservation or judgment. James in particular always reached out to me and provided me with sage advice, encouragement and assurances that I would get back on my feet. I know that James has served in this role, as a compassionate audience, sounding board and advocate, for numerous members of his family and his community over the years, always trying to uplift and embolden those around him. His work ethic, moral compass and unwavering commitment to doing what is right serve as an inspiration to all who know him.

Although James has made mistakes in the past, I believe it is how he bounces back from those mistakes that defines him. He has taken the necessary steps to become a better person, and I have no doubt that he will use this experience as an opportunity to learn and grow.

I believe James deserves leniency at his sentencing hearing. He has worked hard to become the person he is today, and I am confident that this experience will help him to become an even more compassionate and understanding individual.

Best regards,
[REDACTED]
Amie Siebert
58EE757226A640C...
Amie Siebert, esq.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
South Orange, NJ

Exhibit A-19

Stephanie Kane
San Diego, CA [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
January 21, 2023

Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street NY, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote,

I am writing to you on behalf of James Velissaris to provide insight into his character, reputation, and acts of generosity that I have witnessed over the 15 years of knowing James. I was a colleague and a very close friend of his wife when I met James. She was in my wedding, and I was proud to stand as a bridesmaid when she married James.

When I first met James, I was very critical of him, just as a family member might be when a person you love introduces a significant other. Through my initial and continued interactions with James over the years, he emits generosity in his actions, is focused on prioritizing his family, active in his church, and like me has an extremely strong work ethic. His core values and faith are what drives him day to day, and that is evident in how he has lived his life.

Despite growing up in poverty and parental dysfunction, James persevered, defied all odds and was accepted into Harvard. However, James is not entitled, he does not take things for granted, and did not let his childhood stop his forward momentum in building a career that resulted in him being recognized by industry as an expert in trading.

James takes care of friends and family and is someone people look to for support. He has provided his mother with emotional as well as day to day support (ensuring bills were paid on time, ample food in the house, and medical attention when needed) since 2008, when the housing crisis left his mother and stepfather bankrupt and without a proper home.

I've witnessed firsthand James' dedication to his family when he was visiting my husband and I in San Diego. James loves to cook, and we bonded over our love of food. We were having a couple's cooking competition when James received a call from his mother that his stepfather was having a major health episode. James immediately left our home to take a last-minute flight to take care of his stepfather and provide emotional support for his mother, because family always comes first with James.

James also dedicates his time to his friend's families who are in need. This is evidenced by his trip to Chicago to be with the family of his childhood best friend who recently took his own life. James is a person who provides unwavering support and has unflinching courage. We are all so lucky to have him in our life.

In closing, please consider who James Velissaris is from the people that know him best. Please consider the impact that he has made to so many as well as the values that he instills and shares with others when determining his sentence.

Regards,
Stephanie Kane

stephanie kane

Exhibit A-20

Mrs. Shawn W. Fraser

[REDACTED]
Oakton, VA

January 22, 2023

Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States Courthouse
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

I am writing this letter in support of James Velissaris. It is my understanding that you will be making a decision regarding sentencing in the case brought by the United States Department of Justice against James.

As you consider all of the mitigating factors associated with this case, I hope that you will give some consideration to this letter from me. Yes, I am a family member who loves and cares about James and his wife Maria deeply; but I am also a former United States Air Force (USAF) criminal prosecutor who left the military to work in the private sector after several years of military service with a 100% conviction rate. I represented the USAF against defendants who had committed horrific crimes, including rape and child abuse. I also represented the USAF against defendants who had committed financial fraud against the military. I share this information simply to convey that I have some understanding of the weight of the decision you have to make. I hope that you will have the opportunity to really see James Velissaris, to understand his background, to understand his journey from poverty to Wall Street, and to understand his phenomenal heart.

James has been married to my cousin Maria Velissaris for the past 13 years; and I met him 15 years ago when Maria introduced him to our extended family during the 2008 Thanksgiving holiday. To say that we were all impressed with him is an understatement. I am 12 years older than my cousin Maria and very protective, however James was so kind and earnest and just over the moon about Maria that I was immediately thrilled for them. He was quiet and thoughtful and so respectful of our entire extended family. We were so excited to attend their wedding a couple of years later. My sons were 11 years old and 8 years old at the time and they absolutely loved "Aunt" Maria and their new "Uncle" James. James was great with our boys. He was engaging and nurturing and the attention he gave them made them feel important. My husband and I were so appreciative of James' encouragement of our sons. As the years went by, we got to know James better and were so proud of his accomplishments, especially graduating from Columbia University with an advanced finance degree. He worked so hard all of the time and my boys looked up to him and tried to emulate his work ethic as they matriculated through middle and high school.

When our son was in high school, James invited him to spend a week at his job during summer break. I was so appreciative that he would allow our son to shadow him for that week. However, James went above and beyond by putting together an internship program so that our son would get exposure to the many different types of jobs in the finance profession. James facilitated him having the opportunity to work within an actual financial services office. He set up meetings for our son with colleagues at other financial institutions. James put so much thought and effort into making this a meaningful internship for our son.

The experience was absolutely transformational. Our son was a smart and hardworking high school student at a well-respected independent K-12 school. However, he sometimes lacked confidence. As one of only three African American boys in his grade, he sometimes felt unsure of himself and at times unsupported in his academic environment. James helped him to see his own gifts. He took the time out of his busy and relentless schedule to be a mentor. It was a powerful experience. When our son went to college, James helped him prepare for interviews. He coached him and gave him the practical advice that he needed to present himself well. My husband and I will forever be grateful for James' kindness and thoughtfulness.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter in support of James Velissaris. It is important to me that you know about his kind heart. We didn't ask him for anything, but he saw a need and stepped in to help lift up our child. He helped our son to see his potential and gave him the courage to pursue his dreams.

Sincerely,

Shawn W. Fraser

Shawn W. Fraser

Exhibit A-21

January 25, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street NY, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote,

My fondest memory of James Velissaris is from the first time I met him. It was Christmas Eve 2017. I had been dating his wife Maria's brother for almost a year and was visiting Hampton, Virginia, to meet my now husband's family for the first time. Boy, was I nervous. James, with the second face I saw as his wife and mother-in-law were busy getting things ready for the day's festivities. He was walking out of the restroom, stretched his arms towards me, and kindly said, "Hey! You must be Cat? I'm Maria's husband. It's so nice to meet you." His hug made me feel accepted and calmed my nerves tremendously because, as an in-law, his comfortability in the family I was hoping to marry into helped me feel at ease.

Over the years, James and I have become friends. When he and his wife moved to Atlanta, our bond strengthened. Because my husband travels a lot for work, the three of us spend a lot of time together exploring their new city. We'd go on hikes and play tennis together, or I'd stay at their house or vice versa, watching movies and trying new restaurants or recipes. Ironically, we'd always have these heart-to-heart conversations about life. It never failed. What I learned from those conversations about James is his love of family, devotion to his faith, and moral compass. A few times, we talked about marriage. He'd get emotional talking about his love for his wife, how he worried about her health but praised her strength and resilience. He loved both of his mothers deeply -- the mother who birthed him and his wife's mother. I witnessed his love for his mother when he lost his stepfather, how he carried the weight of that loss for his entire family, and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. James cared for her like a loving son. Seeing how tender, selfless, and human he is was beautiful.

Your Honor, while I understand I am writing a character letter for James because of his circumstances, my sincerest intent is not to disrespect you or the judicial system. To be honest, this is hard to write because this is hard to believe and comprehend. To me, James is fundamentally a good person who deserves a reprieve. But, if not that, he deserves grace. The same grace and kindness he's shown me and everyone who knows and loves him as I do.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cat Toler

Catherine 'Cat' Toler
[REDACTED]

Exhibit A-22

CHERYL D. SMITH

January 25, 2023

The Honorable Judge Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

RE: U.S. vs. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

My name is Cheryl Smith, and I am writing to express my strong support and request leniency on behalf of a wonderful man, Mr. James Velissaris. I have served as a Teacher at a Christian school for a little over 15 years, and my husband and I are actively involved in ministry in our local church.

I have known James for several years because he is married to my cousin. I am elated to have him as part of our family. The relationship he has with us, his in-laws, and our entire family is one of mutual love and respect. When he came into the family it was as if he had been there all along. He is a loving and supportive spouse and has been an excellent role model for our 16-year-old son. He always took time to talk with him and share words of encouragement and wisdom. From the time I met him he has proven to be a dedicated individual who is responsible, hard-working, and kind-hearted. James has been a positive influence in the lives of those around him and has made many valuable contributions to his community.

James' unquestionable character and commitment to His faith as a Christian has kept him during difficult times. He has remained steadfast and unmovable and is a dedicated member of his church.

Your Honor, in light of the extenuating circumstances, I respectfully ask that you consider leniency when determining James's sentence. I believe that he has much to offer society and will be a positive influence on those around him. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Cheryl D. Smith

Cheryl D. Smith
Upper Marlboro, MD



Exhibit A-23

The Honorable Denise L. Cole
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, New York 10007

January 25, 2023

Re: U.S v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cole:

I have known James Velissaris for over a decade. He married Maria Toler, my adopted niece and I was the mistress of ceremonies at their wedding. As an "auntie", I have watched James mature and grow as he pursued and completed his Masters degree to advance his budding career. I watched him seek the Lord as he transformed his spiritual life. He even became an active virtual participant at my church, Alfred Street Baptist Church. I watched him become a strong, loving and protective husband. I watched him clutch his arms around his immediate family in times of need. He's a quiet man but assertive in following through in his belief to care for others. Family and friends were important and he showed his love and generosity for them with his hospitality. On multiple occasions, I witnessed how graciously he hosted gatherings in his New Jersey and Atlanta homes. I was particularly touched by his kindness and willingness to host a birthday week-end celebration for me when I was going through a rough patch in my life.

During the height of Covid, James drove hundreds of miles from Atlanta to Northern Virginia, where I lived, to spend quality time with his in-laws in Burke, Va. At that time, Zoom was a novelty, but it made it possible for him and his wife to set up offices away from their Atlanta home for several weeks. The sacrifice was never too large when it came to family.

James doesn't like to be in the limelight but for years I knew he was a generous donor to the Donna Saunders Foundation in Northern Virginia. This foundation supports and funds the financial and emotional needs of breast cancer patients during their chemotherapy treatments. He believed and still believes that giving back to the community is an important responsibility.

Your Honor, James is a thoughtful, kind, generous and compassionate person who is an asset to his family, friends and the community. I pray that the positive attributes described in this letter are a testimony of James Velissaris, who deserves to be considered for leniency in this case. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nikki H Johnson

Exhibit A-24

From,
Archie B. Weston III

Humble, TX [REDACTED]

To,
The Honorable Judge Denise L. Cole,
United States District Judge Southern
District of New York 500 Pearl St,
New York, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Denise L. Cole,

I am writing this letter to refer James Velissaris in regards to his character.

I would like to introduce myself as Archie B. Weston III, and James Velissaris is my cousin. I have known James all of his life, our mother's are siblings. We come from a very big family and we are very close. James and I are only 1 year apart so we spend a ton of time together growing up. It wasn't easy for us growing up in Chicago especially as both of our father's left our families, but we relied on one another to persevere through it.

Going into our senior year of college while visiting James at Harvard I expressed that I wanted to come back to Chicago for summer break but didn't have a place to stay. Without hesitation he invited me to live with him and Christopher (his brother, my cousin) free of charge.

In 2018 James got us tickets to the Bears/Giants game to celebrate our birthdays. We are both huge Chicago bears fans and it meant a lot for him to do such a selfless gesture.

In 2019 James helped me through a very rough time in my life. I was going through a divorce and he not only counseled me but lead me in prayer multiple times.

These are three specific examples are of why I can vouch for the character of James Velissaris. He has always displayed good intentions, very kind heart and has always put his family first. James is a great asset to the community and is a great role model.

Thank You,

Archie B. Weston III

Exhibit A-25

Peter Weston
[REDACTED]
New York, NY [REDACTED]

February 21, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote,

My name is Peter Weston. I am an attorney in New York City (NY State bar registration # 5214853) and I am writing to provide a character reference for my cousin, James Velissaris.

I have known James all my life. Our mothers are sisters, we both grew up in Chicago and James is just a year older than me. James and I also both attended Harvard College (James was class of 2007 and I was class of 2008) and we both have lived and worked in New York City most of our adult lives. At every stage in life that I have known James, he has been a humble, loving and hard working person.

Growing up, James experienced an extraordinary amount of adversity. James' father was abusive and his whole family suffered as a result of it. After James' mother divorced his father, his family experienced a lot of financial hardships and the psychological trauma of surviving and coming to terms with experiencing his father's abuse. Despite these hardships, miraculously James managed to thrive. In high school, James worked hard to achieve good grades and become a sensational football star, breaking Illinois high school records for most rushing yards in a season. I wonder how James made it through this horrific period in his life, and I can only credit it to his faith in God and his remarkable ability to maintain a positive outlook.

As a young adult, James exemplified hard work, dedication and humility. At Harvard, he balanced a demanding schedule as a varsity football player and dedicated student. When he began his career after college, he worked long hours but he made sure to make time for family, often hosting family get togethers at his home in New Jersey. Although I understood James was excelling professionally, we rarely spoke about his career because James was never the type to brag about himself. He was more interested in hearing updates from our extended family and planning the next get together.

I have no doubt that James will spend the rest of his life working hard to make amends for any mistakes or failings in his recent career. James has survived many hardships and getting his life back on track won't be easy, but he has a dedicated family that is eager to support him and shower him with love just as he has done for us all these years.

Sincerely yours,

Peter Weston

Peter Weston

Exhibit A-26

Reading, MA

January 30, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

RE: *U.S. vs Velissaris*

Dear Judge Cote,

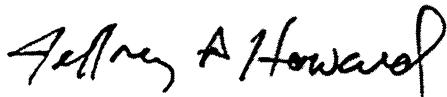
I've known James Velissaris since his mother, my cousin Rita, brought pre-teen James and his older brother to visit me in Boston. It was a good visit; I'm a Harvard alumnus, and James has told me that the visit influenced his aspirations, setting his sights on Harvard.

Once he arrived in Cambridge, James visited regularly, and my wife and I got to know him well. We were proud of his achievements, impressed by his decency and his determination to achieve something important.

For us, James' character has been exemplified by his quiet humility, and his commitment to his wife, and on-going love and support for his family.

My greatest hope is that when this episode is done, James will be in a position to use his very considerable talents to benefit society. He is capable of making a difference.

Regards,



Jeffrey P. Howard, PhD.

Exhibit A-27

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street, NY, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

I am writing to you on behalf of James Velissaris. I have known James since 2005 and view him as a close friend. He is intelligent, hard-working and cares deeply for others.

James has an energy that excites those around him. He is interested in and cares to learn about people when he meets them. His openness and energy allow him to transcend social borders created by different backgrounds, economic status, areas of passion and skills. If you look at his close friends, it is a very diverse group of great people who care greatly for James because he is a supportive and genuine friend. When we first met, it appeared we had little in common. He was from Chicago, loved economics, and played on the football team. I was a political science major from Boston. And yet, we connected easily – a testament to his openness and curiosity. In my experience he has been highly respectful of others' views, even when those views conflict with his own, and has tried to understand more as opposed to simply re-stating his perspective.

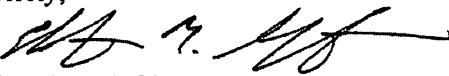
James has consistently displayed a steady work ethic, even in the face of adversity. In my experience, James was never given anything. I understand he worked hard to get into college. Once at college, he successfully balanced academic performance with the demands of being fully committed to a sport, while also building and maintaining lasting personal relationships. These are incredibly difficult to do simultaneously, and he achieved this balance without complaint. Instead, his enthusiasm rallied those around him.

In the years we have known each other, James has always been family oriented. In the early days it was talking about the families and children we were going to raise. My family would have been completely different without James as he is the one who gave me the courage to introduce myself to my wife. It has been great fun getting to know James' wife Maria, and observing their partnership and love for each other. I have often observed James' love and support for his family, whether it is his relationships with his brother or Maria's brothers, or supporting his mother in difficult moments.

James is a giving person. Whether it is charitable giving, teaching others, or even something as seemingly mundane as bringing my daughter a costume on Halloween. He was always willing to help.

My life has been improved by having James in it. He has been a true, loyal and honest friend. He loves his family and has been very supportive and caring of mine.

Sincerely,



Christopher M. Gleysteen

Address: New York, NY

Exhibit A-28

Kathryn F. McDermott

Laguna Niguel, CA

January 24, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

RE: U.S. v. James Velissaris

To The Honorable Denise L. Cote:

James Velissaris has been a close friend of mine for nearly 15 years. When I first met James, he was a recent graduate and spoke of how he wanted to build something that would allow him the resources to help kids like him move up in our society and take advantage of the opportunities here in the United States. As the son of a single mother and abusive father, he was able to use his God-given academic and athletic gifts to receive a scholarship to attend Harvard University, an opportunity that most in his underserved community in Chicago could only dream of attaining.

James has never received a handout and has worked hard for everything he has achieved. As I think of my many interactions with James, I see a man who is always true and there for those around him. This man epitomizes outstanding commitment to his goals and work ethic; first one in the office every morning and last one to leave at night, then attending graduate school at Columbia while working full time. His integrity, honesty, and kindness are traits that I never saw waiver. Generous to a fault, he is always considerate to those around him; whether by supporting family members' college tuition or paying his mother's mortgage, he always goes out of his way to provide for his extended family.

Finally, James was able to realize his dream of expanding his philanthropic reach upon creating the Toler Velissaris Scholarship for Academic Excellence with his wife in 2020 when he saw that many kids in the underserved Atlanta schools were struggling more than ever to afford college. To date, the fund has provided scholarships to 8 students, improving the trajectory of low-income minority students in Atlanta.

After the forced exit from the successful hedge fund he started, James could have taken many different paths. He could have lived a life of leisure. But instead, he chose to create. He wrote and produced a movie that tells the story of the first fully integrated college football team in the nation, highlighting a pivotal moment in our civil rights history and elevating the profile of prominent, heroic Black men.

James embodies the American dream. He is an African American child of the 80s who—against all odds—was able to get into the greatest university in the world. He then went on to build great wealth for many people, but more importantly he has been a positive influence and role model within the communities he supports.

James is the kind of person who is a force for good. A devout Christian, a loyal husband, an incredible son, and wonderful friend, he has been and needs to continue to be a positive influence in our society. He has overcome and learned so much over the years and through this ordeal I know James will better serve our society as a free man, where he can continue to work and inspire the many young Black men like him all over our country.

Yours truly,


Kathryn F. McDermott

Exhibit A-29

Derrick Maschoff

Northbrook, IL

1/18/23

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

I am sending you this letter to request sentencing leniency on behalf of James Velissaris. James has been one of my best friends for over 20 years going back when we first met in 7th grade.

Over the course of our friendship, I have come to know how incredibly gifted, smart, loving, and hardworking James is. Throughout James' life, he has overcome many challenges that life has thrown at him. Growing up in the Northshore of Chicago, James did not come from much money compared to others, in addition to being a minority in a predominately Caucasian community. As a result, there were plenty of social stereotypes and barriers for James to overcome. James was able to conquer these challenges through excelling at sports and academics, which earned him scholarships from some of the country's most prestigious universities in the country. After college, James landed positions in some of the biggest names in the financial industry. James could not have done this without the help of his faith as a strong Christian and support from his friends and family.

This whole experience has utterly devastated James. James' credibility and reputation has been damaged to a point that it will take a very long time to recover from. This is something that has weighed heavily on James' conscience, which is an intrinsic punishment that he has been enduring since the start of this investigation. However the only way that he can begin to try and repair these things can be through his actions going forward.

I'm writing to ask for your leniency in your sentence consideration for James to give him the ability to right his wrongs and work on restoring his reputation. A man of his talents and skills can be best utilized when out in society versus locked down without freedom. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I hope that you use it to help with your decision related to one of my best friend's freedom to be involved in my life going forward.

Sincerely,

Derrick Maschoff

Exhibit A-30

Rob Wilder

[REDACTED]
Lake Forest, IL [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

January 10th, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

I have been a business owner and servant leader in my community for 15 years. I am a past president of the Lake Forest / Lake Bluff Illinois charter of Lion's Club International and mentor in two non-profit business incubators.

I am writing to provide a character reference for James Velissaris. I have known Mr. Velissaris for 25+ years and can attest to his good character and positive societal contributions.

I am aware of the charges that have been brought against Mr. Velissaris. While I cannot speak to the specifics of the case, it is my priority to offer an endorsement that Mr. Velissaris is a person of strong moral character and integrity. Mr. Velissaris is dependable and hardworking and has always been respectful and considerate of others, even when unfair circumstances and prejudices exist. Further, Mr. Velissaris is an attentive husband, a loving family member, and a valued community member, always willing to help others.

I have known James Velissaris since he was in sixth grade. At that time, he had moved to Northbrook, IL, along with his older brother, Chris Velissaris, who became my best friend, and remains my best friend and business partner 25 years later. Being close to James Velissaris from adolescence through adulthood affords me true insight into his good nature with the ability to share plenty of experiences. I could speak to Mr. Velissaris' values and characteristics to no end, but I will do my best to keep it concise.

Mr. Velissaris was never handed anything - he earned all of his success, despite plenty who would root against him for no other reason than the color of his skin. Citing one particular story, Mr. Velissaris was confronted with direct racism from a parent in our community, and he responded with nothing more than grace and forgiveness.

As Mr. Velissaris continued to develop in his formative years, he was acknowledged as an exceptional student-athlete. As one of our hometown's greatest athletes, his accomplishments in sports are only rivaled by his achievements in coursework. I witnessed firsthand that his path to excellence was none other than sheer hard work and dedication to learning. Self-driven, he was learning in the classroom when he wasn't learning on the field. It was widely acknowledged among peers and classmates that Mr. Velissaris was determined and gifted in critical and probabilistic thinking. Moreover, he was counted upon for this strength, and he has served that role with the kind of humility that only comes from a good person willing to be inclusive and help others succeed.

In uncertain times, we seek leaders that dare to share light when everything around us feels dark. Mr. Velissaris is a courageous leader who has held the grace of God in his heart and has been a fixture of faith in his community, with many looking to him for strength, guidance, and support. Mr. Velissaris has faced plenty of adversity, and I pray that his kindness, love, and dedication as a good human will be considered.

Thank you for considering my character reference for Mr. James Velissaris. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Rob Wilder

A930AA366C8A4A4...

Rob Wilder

Exhibit A-31

The Honorable Judge Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street NY, NY 10007

February 16, 2023

RE: U.S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

As an attorney licensed in NY/NJ, the daughter of a JAG Judge, and someone who has known Mr. James Velissaris for over 15 years, I respectfully request reconsideration of his sentence.

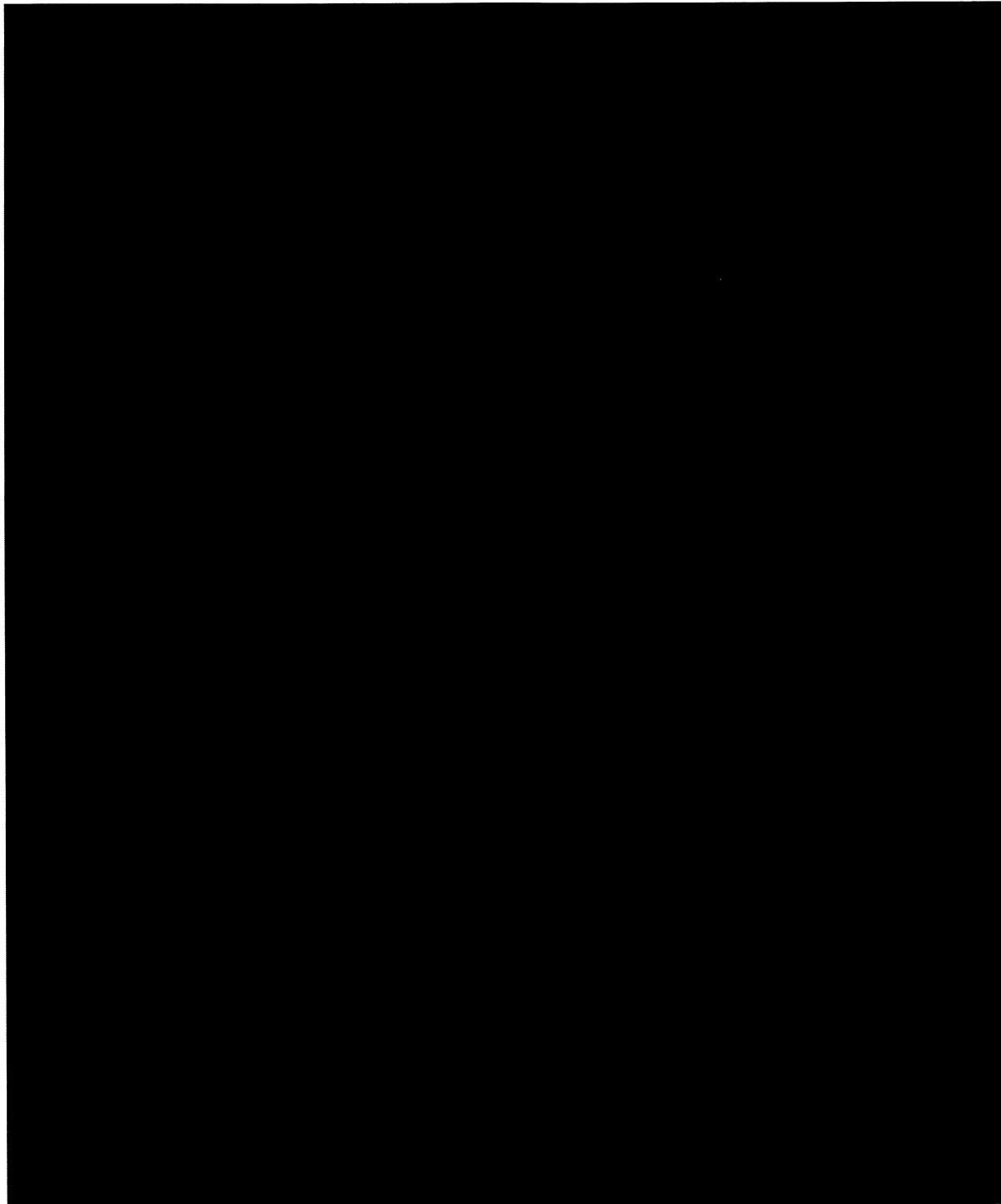
James is a kind, funny, family oriented husband and friend. He is honest, and has always been a humble high performer. He is generous, and deeply religious. He is not greedy; it simply is not in his nature. He's the biggest advocate and supporter of his wife, my best friend Maria, who I've known most of my life. When she met James in 2008, her friends all knew they were meant for each other, and we all relished in his gentleness and love for her. Its disheartening to see what he's going through. Someone like him does not need to be in prison. He has so much to offer. I wholeheartedly believe that his sentence, let alone any jail time, is excessively harsh.

I want to highlight James' relationship with my 9-year-old son, [REDACTED] because I believe the way adults interact with children is a true indication of character. I also believe that children have an innate ability to see someone's character, and that they gravitate towards goodness. James spends real time with [REDACTED] He engages him. Encourages him. He's silly with him. Plays sports with him. Because of this [REDACTED] glows around him. He is happy and self-confident when they are together. After our visits with James, [REDACTED] cries because he doesn't want to leave him. It breaks my heart that anyone could think, let alone accuse, James of being anything but genuine and kind-hearted. I hope, and sincerely request, that you'll reconsider prison time.



-Ashley Ganci, Esq





P.S. It wasn't difficult for me to find these photos. This is an example of one visit.

Exhibit A-32

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007
RE: *U.S. vs Velissaris*

1-14-23

Dear Judge Cote,

I have known Mr. James Velissaris since he was in high school. My interaction has been one of encouragement and a sounding board to Mr. Velissaris during certain times in his life. His step-father, Dr. David Claerbaut, an important figure in his life, would encourage our interactions through church and family interactions, and provided consistent developmental care. There are a number of consistent qualities Mr. Velissaris demonstrated from high school through adulthood. He demonstrated servant-leadership as he looked to make-himself a better example, leader and overall performer for his football teams in high school and college. He showed resilience in coping with life stresses of his parent's divorce; learning how to live in two households and in growing in a closeness and trust to his mother and step-father. Another important quality that Mr. Velissaris has is a big heart. Through conversations after church, with his step-father, he would speak of questions on how to help individuals and the reality of social ills. He was a great support to his mother in her later years as well as, his step-sister who is grateful for his acceptance of her as a sister.

In conclusion, my hope for this stage of the trial is that Mr. Velissaris will be provided a structure to give back to the community. Through a process of Mr. Velissaris staying in the community, he can provide consult to non-profits, community agencies and use the human capital he possesses; thus, a "good" can be established through service. The human capital I speak of is his academic training, resilience to flourish in spite of past dysfunctional relational systems, and a heart that seeks to aid others. Mr. Velissaris has shown over the years, servant-leadership that I believe is not lost within him and can be of great value to our society.

Your Honor, with respect to you and your position, I encourage a conclusion to this trial that allows Mr. Velissaris to give back to society for the social and common good and his personal rehabilitation through direct community servanthood.

Thank you for your time and service to our society.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Larkin M.Div., M.S.W., Ph.D.

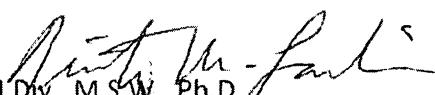


Exhibit A-33

January 17, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote:

Re: In the matter of James Velissaris

Our family has known James Velissaris for over 25 years. We have seen him grow and mature as a solid Christian and leader in our community.

While we are certain that you have received many letters similar to this over the years, in our view, James is different.

We can vouch for his character regardless of the issues associated with his present situation and circumstances.

Sincerely yours,



Dean C. Maschoff

[Redacted]

Exhibit A-34

February 6, 2023

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street NY 10007

Re: U.S. v. James Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

We, Matthew and Natalie Peloquin, are writing in regards to the sentencing for our cousin, James Velissaris. We know you must be reading a lot of letters in regards to this case, so we'll quickly get to the point.

James is not the person you *may* think he is. James graciously accepted my husband, Matthew, into our family with open arms before and during our marriage. We frequently made trips to Atlanta to visit him and his wife, Maria. He welcomed us into his home, and shares our priorities of faith, family, and friendship. That's why it is so easy to get along with James - he's a genuine guy who, with a child-like curiosity, has interests and passions he enjoys in life.

We are writing to humbly cast doubt on preconceived notions that you may hold about James. James is extremely kind, generous, and over anything else, believes that family is the most important thing of all. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Taking him away from the people he loves the most will be gut-wrenching and a long sentence would be a senseless waste of resources, considering the nonviolent nature of this offense.

We know you have to do your part in the sentencing process. But we want to remind you, Your Honor, about how precious our cousin James is to us, how precious he is to our family, especially his wife, Maria, and his [REDACTED]

James is generous with his time and always tries to give back to his community. He and his wife, Maria, generously offered scholarships to underprivileged students to help aid in their future. He coached me during my undergrad and law school years. He's always willing to listen and lend a helping hand to anyone in any way that he can.

James is not the person this case may infer that he is. He's a normal guy - just like us and you. He loves football and his family. He's intelligent and giving. He's special and loved. And he's deserving of grace and the opportunity to spend time with his family who he loves the most.

We hope that this letter casts doubt on any inferences that you may hold about our cousin. James is so deserving of leniency and a second chance. It would mean the world to him, to his wife Maria, and to our family if we can continue to have James' spirit enrich our lives as he has done and will continue to do.

Respectfully,
Matthew and Natalie Peloquin

Matthew Peloquin

Natalie Weller

P.S. - James is an incredible person and we pray that you give him mercy and grace. Thank you for your consideration.

Exhibit A-35

[REDACTED] Jonathan Beckham [REDACTED]

January 24, 2023

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Denise Cote
U.S. District Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Character Reference, US v. Velissaris

Dear Judge Cote:

I have worked as a practicing lawyer for over twenty-six years, and have known James Velissaris in a personal capacity for approximately ten years, and other members of his family for a quarter-century. I have always found James to be conscientious, humble, kind-hearted, thoughtful, civic-minded and interested in enhancing the lives of our youth and others. He is an upstanding member of the community who, I pray and hope, will continue to have an opportunity to bless us all in the years to come with his inquisitive nature, dedication, drive and passion for sharing experiences with family and friends.

From discussions with James over the years, I have come to realize that James' background informs his impressions of the world around him and has imbued within him the drive and passion that fuel him. While James was privileged to attend Harvard University, while busy with academics and as a member of the football team, he washed dishes throughout his collegiate career in order to manage costs and mitigate any burden on his family. This experience facilitated some degree of separation from his peers, but also makes his achievements and ability to survive and thrive in a challenging environments much more noteworthy. James has a strong interest in giving back and in uplifting others whose circumstances may not fit a typical profile for achievement.

Further, during discussion with James, he always manages to reflect on his opportunities and to offer opportunities for youth in his sphere to benefit from these opportunities. These have included internships, opportunities to observe and learn the filmmaking business, and so on. James strikes me as a very patient and caring person who has exhibited and displayed the Christian values that he holds at all times.

James' curiosity and intelligence are evident from a number of circumstances. James has a passion for college football, and crafted a relatively unknown historical recounting of racial integration in college football. He approached this film endeavor in a manner infused with passion, data analytics, careful concern for the quality of the entire undertaking, and a desire to share a story

The Honorable Denise Cote
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that was important to him. We all hope to benefit from the completion of this endeavor and appreciate having watched him develop the film and to offer learning experiences to many.

Finally, I am also aware of the passion and pride that James brought to his work as a hedge fund manager. He has been a source of pride for his family and community. I am aware that the work is challenging and difficult. James managed to remain humble and accessible throughout his tenure as a successful manager. I hope that the court will recognize James' successes, and the goodwill and charitable spirit that he presents on a daily basis. Based upon my personal interactions with James over the years, any other characterization of James' character and spirit would be grossly inaccurate.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Beckham

Exhibit A-36

Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Court Judge
Southern District of New York
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

I humbly write today on behalf of my friend James Velissaris, who I've known for nearly 15 years. As a spiritual counselor and practicing therapist, I've spent decades learning to understand and empathize with the human experience. Unfortunately, I've been on the frontlines of this traumatic experience with James and his family.

James has spent his life overcoming challenges and building a future that he could be proud of living. He supported his friends, family, church, and even strangers in need. Because of his upbringing, he understands the plight of people and has deep empathy for those undergoing struggle.

He is a generous and caring man of faith, who recently, among other charitable givings, supported the The Bail Project. He was inspired to give by hearing the stories of injustice within the legal system and wanted to do his part to help people in need. Ironically, James now finds himself on the other side of the narrative, where he may be bestowed the highest of penalties.

Honorable Judge, I pray that you are willing to extend to James grace and mercy as a husband and kind and caring member of our community.

Kind regards,
Mina Alexander